

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, February 13, 2003

Members present: Deborah Emello, Karl Haglund, James Heigham, Andrew McClurg

Members absent: Joseph Barrell

Also present: Tim Higgins, Senior Planner

Jeffrey Wheeler, Planning Coordinator

7:00 p.m. The meeting was called to order by acting Chairman, Andrew McClurg. He stated that the purpose of this work session is to collect data, opinions and commentary on the Trapelo Road/ Belmont Street corridor. It functions in many ways as Belmont's main street and is very important. The Board will be developing a comprehensive land use plan to promote growth and economic development. But first, the Board needs a "vision" of what people want the corridor to be before it can begin the task.

Planning Coordinator Jeffrey Wheeler presented and discussed four (4) land use maps of the business areas along the corridor. 11 reduced sets of the plans were distributed and it was noted that the maps are on the Corridor web page. He explained the difference between LBI, LBII and LBIII. LBI zoned areas are the main business districts (Cushing, downtown, Waverley). LBII is Pleasant Street and allows automotive uses (only district). LBIII zones are in the residential areas and provide for smaller, family owned types of businesses. It was noted by Mr. McClurg that there are a large number of pre-existing non-conforming uses (older development) and the study will look at these closely.

Andrew McClurg also noted that the Belmont Citizen's Forum (BCF) is also doing work in the area and asked Susan Bass to make a brief statement. He hoped the BCF work could be integrated into the Planning Board study. Susan Bass emphasized the need for public participation. The Forum has developed a slide show identifying the issues but not providing answers. She wants the Town to allow employees to sit in a panel along with a planning board members. The program is proposed to be in April (1st two weeks) on Trapelo Road at the Belmont Studio Theatre. After speaking with T. Higgins, and acknowledging the Planning Board's meeting schedule, she stated that the BCF will attempt to have the show ready for the March 13 work session of the Board. Mr. McClurg reiterated the Board's authority and responsibility in the planning of the Town and asked that the BCF work within the framework of the Planning Board. He was noncommittal on providing municipal staff for the BCF, as there was not a full Board present.

Interested parties made the following comments:

Robert O'Brien recommends traffic lights be timed to allow vehicles to pass through Town quickly. Need over passes to make it pedestrian friendly. Also make Waverley Square a larger transportation station.

Andrea Masciari (Belmont Citizen's Forum) read the purpose of the BCF work.

Wendy McDonald - wants more cultural amenities and less emphasis on businesses needs. Wants to keep "small town atmosphere".

Mary Beekam - doesn't want to speed up traffic, would attract more. She is required to go to Arlington for most of her services – wants more and better businesses. Tough being a pedestrian, but more pedestrians slows traffic.

Katharine MacPhail – wants more and better commercial use to walk to from abutting neighborhoods. It is not vital.

Rosemary Burke - wants improved aesthetics in the commercial areas. Wants design/review capability to promote Waverley train station – use as an advantage. Supports parking garages where lots are. Also concerned about vacancies. Why? Support a center island and bicycle storage area therein. Supports apartments over businesses.

Jim Murphy – 50 year Belmont Street resident. Trapelo Road is a two-lane road not a four-lane road as it currently operates. Should be operated as a two-lane road.

Chris Arthur – Belmont/Trapelo is too wide and traffic is too fast. Time the signals to slow traffic to 25 mph. More crosswalks and bump-outs. More traffic lights could help slow speeds.

Carolyn Bishop – also wants to slow traffic, create village centers where people can stop, park and shop. Charging for parking doesn't work – penalize short-term users.

Vicky Hubbard – buses create problem (electric) and prevent narrowing the street.

Rob Stafford - wants to expand shops to create more centers and villages, not strips. Need more businesses for the shops to be successful "Clustering".

Carl Brauer – likes "urban village" concept and mixed use approach (businesses and residences above for example). Would like an "Arts District" but realizes studio space (re: high density) would need to be allowed.

Joe Greene – (business owner, Trapelo Road) supports raised parking, businesses rely on the pass-by-traffic and need parking for patrons. Need to be cognizant of private-property rights.

Don Becker – provided the Board with a memo on traffic calming-first presented to the Board of Selectmen in 2000 (see file). Wants to see improve bicycle access/provision as there is sufficient room. We need balance when developing are long range plan.

Jennifer Page (Vision 21 I. Committee Chair) Would also like to see better bicycle accommodations made along with wider sidewalks (noted they are 15’ in s.f. California). Wider side walker allow for higher buildings with less visual impacts. Use of “Resident Parking Stickers” is a good idea. She noted that the Vision 21 Committee report on the Business Forum is done and is on the Town’s website.

Meg O’Brien – notes that there is a lack of parking due to previous/historical use (Trolley line). We need more parking spaces today. She wants to find out why there are so many vacant shops and suggests we do so. Thinks clusters of building would work with zone multi level residential uses.

Mr. McClurg talked about the need for a proper business mix. The Planning Board needs to identify the potential for commercial success. Why do people go to Arlington?

Sara Oaklander (V-21 member and BEDPG Chair) wants BEDPG to work with the Planning Board in coming up with solutions. What can they do? She also noted that we have to determine what makes an area “feel” right. Also notes a need for parking.

Donald Mercier (Belmont Street property owner). Need good parking enforcement but real problem is with landlord being good landlords. Planning Board must be sensitive to what neighborhoods want. Liberalize rules to allow other uses. Need wider sidewalks – good idea for everyone be easier on the permitting – process is too long for small businesses.

Bill Engstrom, Willow Street – hopes the meeting is being well recorded so others can benefit from it. Time line is too ambitious, go slower to take advantage of the ideas. He suggests “Belmont Resident Parking”. Also supports a parking garage with stores under it.

Banks are creating too much traffic. It is easier to shop where there is more parking (Concord, MA). Wants to buy out non-conforming uses to eliminate them. Does not support residential units over businesses.

Upon the request of the Chair, the following replies were given to the question:

What is good with the Corridor?

- Video Plus building with landscaping and parking
- Use by Belmont residents, not regional users.
- Area between Central Square and Cushing Square – nice residential with setbacks
- Potential for clusters of growth – use existing businesses
- Width allows for rapid access into Boston/Cambridge
- T Service and commuter rail station
- Waverley Square upgrades over the last 10 years

- Cultural diversity of the residents (Butler School has 26 nations)
- Small town character should be preserved.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. The next scheduled meeting is March 25th at 7:00 p.m.